

TEXT: Ms. Christina Merl IMAGE: Marcus Bredt



Traffic and shopping cross paths on five levels at Berlin Central Station.

TRAIN STATIONS AS SHOPPING DESTINATIONS

If I need a last minute gift, I can always find something here," says a young man with a laptop bag, who, clearly on his way to work, is making his way through the crowds towards the departing trains. "The central transport connections, long opening hours, and the attractive mix of services, shopping, and dining options as well as the modern atmosphere make railway station malls a shopping experience," confirms Robert Heineman, head of Communications at ECE Hamburg. "Many travelers want to have the chance to shop for provisions, take advantage of services, and enjoy themselves while they wait for their connection." These are exactly the needs that are addressed when developing shopping centers at train stations. Train stations are shedding their antiquated image of being a place of goodbyes and becoming fun places to spend time. "They are meeting places, shopping centers, restaurant strips, or even temporary offices – all at the same time," says Heinemann. "Many people just come to wander and shop, because there is always something going on."

EVEN ON SUNDAYS

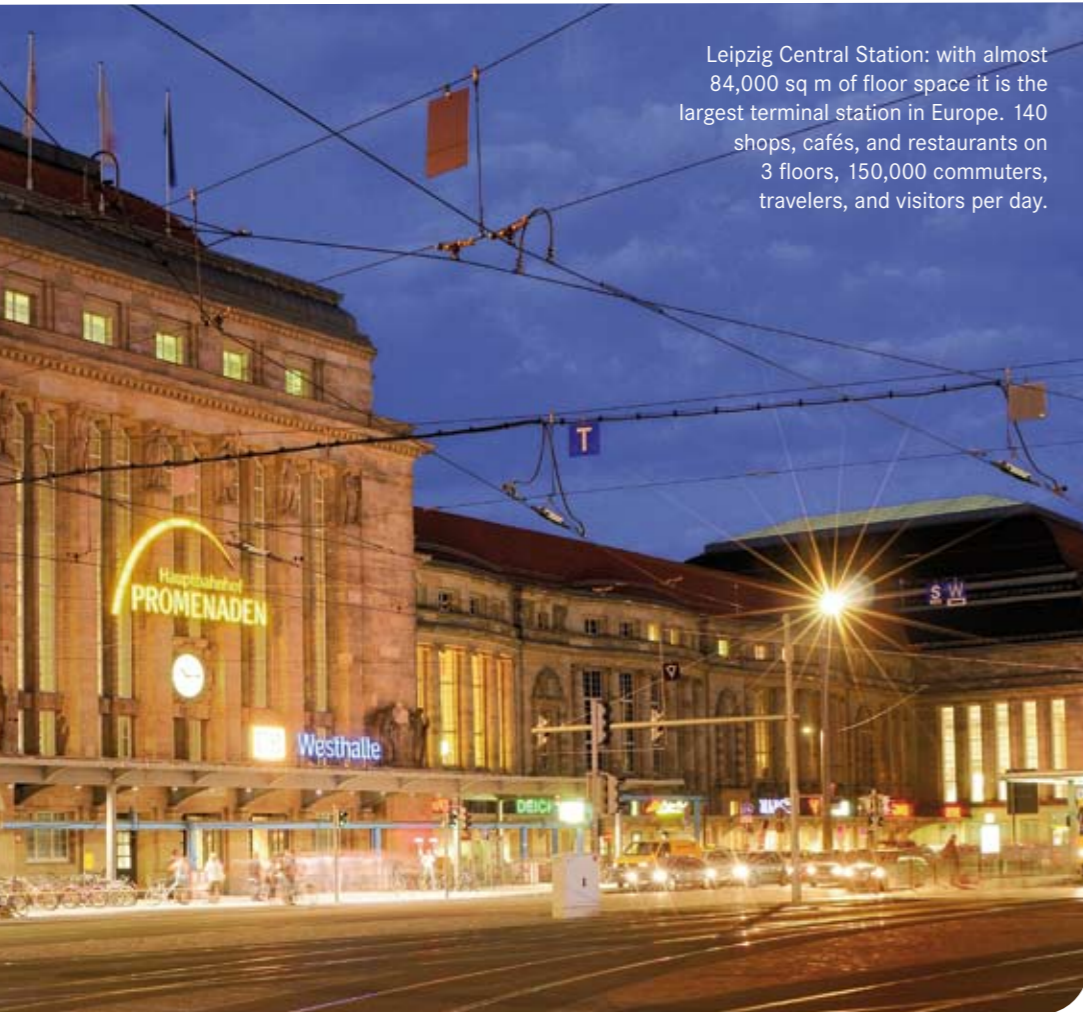
Train stations, like gas stations or airports, not only offer flexible opening hours, but also the chance to combine a shopping trip with a meal. Furthermore, the transportation hubs have a high footfall rate. For many people, the stores are right on the way to their destination, which means an additional time-saver.

Train stations are shedding their antiquated image of being a place for goodbyes and turning into hip shopping worlds. Passersby, travelers, and locals stop in to cover their daily grocery, reading material, and other needs. On Sundays too.

"We pay attention to the demand," Ingrid Heinz, spokesperson for the supermarket chain MPREIS, confirms the buying behavior at train stations. For this reason, the supermarket is even open on the weekends at Innsbruck Central Station. "A special regulation allows us to be open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., 365 days a year." And although this is linked to considerably more expenses and additional personnel costs, retailers want to offer their customers a certain level of comfort on Sundays as well. "It would be downright absurd to not stay open, since the traffic is also high on the weekends," says Heinz. "During the week commuters take advantage of the wait; of course train personnel and locals also appreciate the chance to run little errands on Sundays."

In fact, the number of consumers who are prepared to pay a higher price for goods due to comfort or a lack of time is large, writes Professor Joachim Zentes, who holds a chair in Business Administration at Saarland University and is Director of the Institute for Commerce and International Marketing, in his book, *Handbuch Handel*. The convenience focus in buying behavior has driven this development. "We have especially expanded our snacks, beverages, and fruit selection," explains Heinz. The prices are the same as other locations, which is why it is considered a good alternative to the much more expensive gas station shops.

TEXT: Ms. Christina Merl IMAGES: ECE, Lukas Schaller



Leipzig Central Station: with almost 84,000 sq m of floor space it is the largest terminal station in Europe. 140 shops, cafés, and restaurants on 3 floors, 150,000 commuters, travelers, and visitors per day.



A black glass ceiling gives a feeling of space in MPREIS at Innsbruck Central Station (Architect Rainer Köberl).



TRAIN STATIONS AS RETAIL PROPERTIES

Mall developers and operators agree that the largely downtown and central locations, good accessibility, connections to public transport, and high footfall make a strong case for train station retail. Leipzig Central Station offers a good example. With a usage plan that provided for retail shops and service operations, the goal was to allow the station to become an interesting and appealing hot spot. "The train station proved to be a footfall generator for downtown Leipzig after redesigning, modernizing, and integrating the shopping center with 30,000 sq m of sales floor," says ECE. "Retailers are discovering more and more sources of income here," Robert Heinemann explains the ongoing trend. "The shop mix is

relatively balanced at train stations. The number of dining options and services is greater than in traditional shopping centers, because the travelers' needs have to be met." This, in turn, has a positive effect on footfall.

A CRITICAL LOOK AT FOOTFALL POTENTIAL

Wolfgang Richter, CEO of Vienna-based RegioPlan Consulting GmbH, basically sees two strategies for positioning shopping centers at train stations. "Either you offer stores and services that are aimed specifically at travelers' needs – 8,000 sq m is adequate space for this in cities like Vienna – or a shopping center just happens to be located at a train station and benefits from the station's profile or accessibility. In this case,

roughly 25,000 sq m are necessary," When looking at the cold, hard facts, one thing is clear to Richter, "The location and footfall potential have to fit; the footfall quality, however, needs to be carefully assessed. It may sound tempting to have 30,000 to 50,000 people as potential customers every day, but one must consider the fact that we are talking about the same people coming to this location twice a day." Richter views the controversial project, BahnhofCity Wien West with ambivalence. This will connect to Vienna's largest shopping street and complement the retail offer. While critics question how many people the new shopping destination will actually attract, operators and developers are convinced of the potential footfall. Robert Heinemann of ECE is confident: "In addition to the commuters, we also have people changing trains, subway riders, and tram riders who come just to shop because of the nearby shopping street." Heavy car traffic and good parking options would boost potential even more.

EASTERN MARKET WAITING IN THE WINGS

While shopping centers at train stations in Western Europe are quite common now, Central and Eastern Europe is trailing slightly behind with station projects. "It is still a bit early for projects like this for the Central and Eastern European market," states Richter. "Due the complex and involved implementation of shopping centers at train stations resulting from regulations on protected historical buildings and the duration of construction, the process is very costly. Thus shopping centers are currently more often planned at uncomplicated sites or near train stations."

In Western Europe, train station retail is more likely to pay off, because the purchasing power is higher. Richter: "To my knowledge, Bratislava and Budapest are being considered." In around five years we can certainly expect to see more shopping center projects at train stations in these markets as well. >>>

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>>> Berlin Central Station, designed by the Hamburg architectural firm, Gerkan, Marg, und Partner, is one of the largest central stations in Europe. Around 300,000 travelers pass through every day. Train traffic runs on two levels. Shops and restaurants offer a wide variety of products including clothing, gastronomy, and health & beauty on three more floors from Monday to Sunday between 8 a.m. and 10 p.m. ACROSS talked to Jürgen Hillmer of GMP Architects about the outstanding project.

ACROSS: IS ARCHITECTURE A WAY FOR SHOPPING CENTERS TO STAND OUT?

HILLMER: As architects, we aim to give a building an identity that is appropriate for the usage, climate, surroundings, and respective culture; this also applies to shopping centers. The concrete question is: how can I design the architecture in a way that invites customers for a leisurely stroll and makes them comfortable?

ACROSS: WHAT ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS MADE BERLIN CENTRAL STATION A SUCCESS?

HILLMER: Daylight is an essential factor. We are convinced that the daytime atmosphere should be captured through light, particularly at train stations and airports. The customers shouldn't forget where they are. Shopping center operators are often skeptical of this, because they believe that there shouldn't be anything that could distract customers from shopping. At Berlin Central Station, the question was whether the train operations should be separated from the shopping area or completely integrated. We decided to have the trains run through the building, also through the shopping area, and wanted to convey a special sense of space.

ACROSS: WHAT MAKES THIS STATION SO SPECIAL?

HILLMER: There are five different floors, two floors with traffic and three with retail. Each floor is 430 meters long. The challenge was to guide customers in a way that they can either get to their train quickly or have a leisurely stroll. The flow of traffic had to be planned so that it passes many stores. We solved this by putting the stores alongside the flow area. A slightly arched wooden walkway between the floors invites you to pause for a moment. Visitors can lean back and watch the activity. In such a large complex it was crucial to establish clear orientation and convey the

spatial magnitude. A station and retail should form one unit.

ACROSS: WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT SHOP DESIGN, HOW ARCHITECTURE HELPS SHOPS STAND OUT?

HILLMER: A consistent façade design was very important to us. We came up with a system for this where the operators could choose between different variations, between plate glass, sliding panels, and more. A horizontal advertising banner provides consistency. Many operators believe that each shop should have its own advertising style. In our opinion, this leads to unnecessary sensory overload.

ACROSS: WHAT MATERIALS DO YOU LIKE TO USE IN TRAIN STATIONS?

HILLMER: We use natural materials like wood, glass, and natural stone. The materials have to provide a sense of warmth and be durable enough to withstand vandalism, which cannot be ruled out in public places like train stations. We are very reserved when it comes to color. We provide the neutral background; the products, customers, and travelers add enough color.

ACROSS: HOW IS THE COLLABORATION WITH STORE OPERATORS?

HILLMER: For example, with Berlin Central Station we were all on the same page. We even published a design handbook on behalf of Deutsche Bahn AG, a high-level design catalog for train stations.

ACROSS: HOW IS DEMAND IN THE EASTERN MARKETS?

HILLMER: Right now, shopping centers in train stations are not yet on the agenda. But this will certainly happen. At the moment we are very active in China, where there is a trend toward integrating shopping into stations. ❖

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